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CONTENTS

Nations in Prophecy	page 1
Editorial	page 10
Basic Bible Teaching	page 11
Women of Faith	page 17
Bible Truths	Page 23
Correction Note	Page 24
Acknowledgments	Page 24

COVER PICTURE: The Parthenon - Athens

Nations in Prophecy

Greece

THIS ARTICLE DEALS with a nation well known to many people which is now a member of the European Union. It is also a country visited by thousands of holiday-makers because of the fine weather it enjoys for most of the year.

Greece is about the same size in area as England and it lies at the southern tip of the Balkan peninsula. Four fifths of the land is mountainous, and it is only in the North of the country that it has land borders with other nations – Albania, Macedonia, Bulgaria and Turkey. Elsewhere it is bordered by three seas, the Ionian, the Mediterranean and the Aegean. The country lies at the junction of two continents - Europe and Asia. There are therefore a number of influences which have affected its history, development and culture.

Many Greek words have come into the English language and are familiar to us today. For example, the word 'democracy' is from the Greek word '*demokratia*' which is derived from '*demos*', meaning common people. The word 'marathon' commemorates an event in Greek history when a messenger ran many miles and reported the Greek victory over the Persians at the place called Marathon. 'Olympia' was a Greek city and the site of the temple of Zeus where the 'Olympic' games were first held. These are just a few of the many words of Greek origin that have entered the English language.

The Greek language is one of the ancient languages that together with Hebrew and Latin form the basis of the English translation of the Bible. The Greeks, having been taught their written language by the Phoenicians, added vowels. At the time of Jesus, although the Romans were in power, the most common language in the ancient world was Greek and so the New Testament was written and preserved in the Greek language.

But what of Greece as a nation? Surprisingly, it is only mentioned a few times in the Bible. In the Hebrew language, the word Greece was known as Javan; he was a grandson of Noah who was saved from the flood by the hand of God. The Bible records that from Javan and his descendants '*were the isles of the Gentiles divided in their lands; every one after his tongue, after their families, in their nations.*' [Genesis 10.5] From Javan came the Greek nation, in the Hebrew *bene-hayyeveanim* meaning *the sons of the Javanim*.

Nations and events in the Bible can be of a historical character and also the subject of prophecy and Greece fulfils both of these categories. In the book of the prophet Daniel it was recorded of him and his three companions:

'...in all matters of wisdom and understanding, that the king (Nebuchadnezzar) enquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers that were in all his realm.' [Daniel 1.20]



The Greek Empire which was to succeed the Babylonian & Medo-Persian Empires

NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S DREAM

Daniel and his three friends were among the Jewish captives in Babylon. The king of Babylon had a dream which troubled him and in his anxiety he wanted to know the meaning of it. He ordered his wise men to remind him of the dream and to tell him the meaning of it. Of course they could not do this and

to avoid punishment they went to Daniel for help. The book reveals how Daniel was told the details of the dream and given its meaning by God. Then Daniel said:

‘I thank thee, and praise thee, O thou God of my fathers, who hast given me wisdom and might, and...hast now made known unto us the king’s matter.’ [Daniel 2.23]



Darius III and the Persian troops in full flight from Alexander (far left) at the battle of Issus. Depicted in a Roman Mosaic found in Pompeii in the late 2nd Century BC, from a 4th Century Greek painting. The mosaic is in the National Archaeology museum, Naples.

Daniel revealed to the king details of his dream; how he had dreamed of an image whose head was made of gold, its breast and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of brass with legs of iron and feet part iron and part clay. Daniel told the king ‘*Thou art this head of gold;*’ [Daniel 2.38] so the Babylonian Empire was symbolised by the golden head. After Nebuchadnezzar would come a power represented by the breast and arms of silver. History reveals it was the Medo-Persian Empire that in turn would be followed by the Greek Empire represented by the belly and thighs of brass. Finally, the fourth power was the Roman Empire represented by the two legs of iron.

Here then is a prophecy concerning four empires - one already in existence and three to occur in the future as far as Daniel was concerned. We note that each

metal in the image was on a descending scale in preciousness – from Gold to Iron. In contrast, in terms of strength each metal was on an ascending scale – iron being the strongest.

It is the third of these empires that interests us now, the empire of brass. Let us look at another dream and its meaning.

DANIEL'S FIRST DREAM

This dream is recorded in the book of Daniel chapter seven. It was given to Daniel during the first year of the reign of Belshazzar and the dream referred to four beasts. In the following table, the beasts can be easily related to the four parts of the image of Nebuchadnezzar's dream.

THE BEASTS	THE IMAGE	THE MEANING
Lion with eagle's wings	Golden head	Babylonian Empire
Bear raised on one side	Breast and arms of silver	Medo-Persian Empire
Leopard with four heads	Belly and thighs of brass	Greek Empire
Beast with ten horns	Legs of iron	Roman Empire

As we consider the Greek Empire, we note that Daniel describes its characteristics in this way:

‘...I beheld, and lo another (beast), like a leopard, which had upon the back of it four wings of a fowl; the beast had also four heads; and dominion was given to it.’ [Daniel 7.6]

THE GRECIAN EMPIRE

From about 340 BC, Philip of Macedon united the various Greek tribes into a nation, helped by his son Alexander. Alexander was born in 356 BC and from a youth he was a soldier. Philip was assassinated when Alexander was 20 years

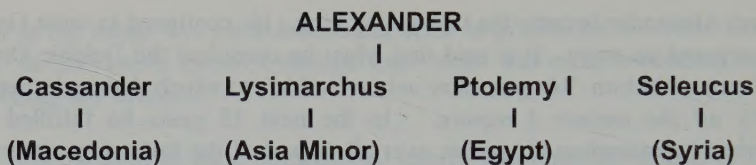
old and Alexander became the undisputed king. He continued to unite Greece and prepared an army. It is said that when he consulted the Delphic Oracle, the seeress told him *'My son, thou art invincible'*, to which Alexander replied *'That's all the answer I require.'* In the next 13 years he fulfilled that statement by extending his power over all or part of the following countries - Turkey, Lebanon, Israel, Tyre, Jordan, Egypt, Libya, Cyprus, Syria, Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, Soviet Central Asia and parts of Pakistan and India.

The book of Maccabees is part of the Apocrypha which is sometimes included in our Bible between the books of the Old and New Testaments. However it is not recognised as part of the Holy Scriptures. In it we find a record of Alexander's conquests:

'...it happened, after that Alexander, son of Philip, the Macedonian...had smitten Darius king of the Persians and Medes, that he reigned in his stead... and made many wars, and won many strong holds, and slew the kings of the earth, and went through to the ends of the earth, and took spoils of many nations, insomuch that the earth was quiet before him... And he gathered a mighty strong host, and ruled over countries, and nations, and kings, who became tributaries unto him.' [1 Maccabees 1.1-4]

Alexander defeated and replaced the previous Empire by conquering and destroying the Persian army under Darius in 331 BC at Arbela; Darius was assassinated soon after. In this way Bible prophecy was fulfilled; the Persian Empire was now replaced by the Greek Empire under Alexander the Great as he became known. Daniel's prophecy describes him as a fierce leopard with wings. The wings are translated elsewhere in the Bible as 'corners' showing the vast area that Alexander controlled and typifying the speed of conquest. This was completed in just 13 years, for in 323 BC he became ill and died when he was only 33 years old.

Alexander left no natural declared heir as ruler of the Empire. Within fifteen years his family was extinct - one of his two wives murdered the other, his brother was murdered by his mother and his two sons were also murdered. Again the prophecy was fulfilled for the beast had four heads. After the death of Alexander his four generals divided the Empire between them:



That once great Empire was now divided and remained so until the Roman Empire grew in strength and finally replaced it in about 100 BC, having swallowed up the provinces that formed the Greek Empire. Indeed, Alexander's mighty Empire started to break up in less time than it had taken him to win it. The Greek Empire lasted about 300 years but never sustained a long period of peace.



The Agora (market-place) and restored Stoa (covered walk-way) of Attalus in Athens

DANIEL'S SECOND DREAM

Daniel Chapter 8 records another dream that Daniel had - this time a ram with two horns followed by a goat:

‘...an he goat came from the west on the face of the whole earth, and touched not the ground: and the goat had a notable horn between his eyes.’ [Daniel 8.5]

The record tells us the meaning of this dream:

‘The ram which thou sawest having two horns are the kings of Media and Persia. And the rough goat is the king of Grecia: and the great horn that is between his eyes is the first king. Now that being broken, whereas four stood up for it, four kingdoms shall stand up out of the nation, but not in his power.’ [Daniel 8.20-22]

The great horn is representative of Alexander and as we have seen, he was succeeded by his four generals who divided the Empire between them. Here again is a prophecy and the meaning of the symbols is given in this prophecy. The Greek Empire was divided and slowly diminished and came to an end being superceded by the Roman Empire as Daniel had predicted.

THE INFLUENCE OF GREECE

However the Grecian people and their language remained. At the time of Christ, the Greek language was widely used and the Old Testament scriptures had been translated into Greek now known as the Septuagint version. The Apostle Paul spoke Greek as we learn from the book of Acts. When he was under arrest in Jerusalem he asked the Roman captain: ‘*May I speak unto thee ?*’ The captain replied: ‘*Canst thou speak Greek ?*’ [Acts 21.37] We also learn from the book of Acts that many of the first century Christians were Greeks: ‘*...a great multitude both of the Jews and also of the Greeks believed.*’ [Acts 14.1]

Some of the early Christian ecclesias (or assemblies) were in Greece. Paul visited Thessalonica and Berea, for example. He also wrote letters to Timothy and Titus who were Greeks. In New Testament times the name Greek was another name for Gentiles or those who were not Jews. Paul wrote to the Roman believers:

‘...I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.’ [Romans 1.16]

‘For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him. For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.’ [Romans 10.12,13]

The Greek Empire came to it's end as Daniel had predicted and after the demise of the Roman Empire, Greece was a divided country. In AD 300 Greece was divided into eight provinces. Much later Greece fell under the rule of the Ottoman Turks but today it is an independent nation again.

History therefore followed Bible prophecy. Four ‘world’ empires existed in turn- ‘world’ meaning the then known habitable part of the earth - Babylonian, Persian, Greek and Roman. The fourth empire was as strong as iron, represented by the two legs of Nebuchadnezzar’s image - the Eastern and Western divisions of the Empire. The toes of the image represented the divided state of Europe following the break-up of the Roman Empire. Those kingdoms were a mixture - some weak some strong, aptly described in Daniel’s words concerning the toes of ‘*iron mixed with miry clay.*’ [Daniel 2.43]

There has never been a lasting European based Empire since the collapse of the Roman Empire. Men like Napoleon and Hitler have attempted to achieve this but they have failed as required by the prophecy that is recorded in the book of Daniel.

THE NEXT WORLD-WIDE EMPIRE

Daniel had told Nebuchadnezzar the meaning of the dream in describing the Empires but also he went on to tell of the destruction of the image in the dream:

‘Thou sawest till that a stone was cut out without hands, which smote the image upon his feet that were of iron and clay, and brake them to pieces...the stone that smote the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth.’ [Daniel 2.34,35]

The interpretation followed:

‘...whereas thou sawest iron mixed with miry clay...in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces

and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever.' [Daniel 2.43,44]

The stone that demolished the image was 'cut out...without hands', implying it was not man made; it then grew and filled the earth. The hand of the Almighty God is revealed here. The kingdoms of men will be destroyed, and replaced by the kingdom of God which will last for ever. This is the certain hope of men and women of faith based on their understanding of the prophecies in the Bible. This is the time that Daniel referred to in the last chapter of his prophecy: '*...at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people: and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was...and at that time thy people shall be delivered...*' [Daniel 12.1]

Jesus Christ will return as promised, to establish the kingdom. The Apostle Peter wrote:

'...he (God) shall send Jesus Christ, which before' was preached unto you: Whom the heaven must receive **until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.'** [Acts 3.20,21]

What then will happen? Daniel again supplies us with the answer:

'...many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever.' [Daniel 12.2,3]

As Daniel was blessed with an understanding of Divinely given dreams, may you the reader, also be blessed with an understanding of God's purpose. Next time you hear news of Greece, think about what the Bible reveals, consider how history proved the accuracy and truth of prophecy. The future is just as certain -- as God told Daniel:

'But go thou thy way till the end be: for thou shalt rest, and stand in thy lot at the end of the days.' [Daniel 12.13]

Colin Opperman
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Editorial

THE EVENTS OF 11th September 2001 seem to have changed the course of world history. In the past American citizens have not been directly affected by acts of war. Suddenly this has all changed. The harrowing scenes of death and destruction in New York have become indelibly printed on the minds of millions of Americans and people the world over.

America has retaliated by waging war on terrorism and the military campaign against the Taliban regime in Afghanistan is now the focus of world attention. The Muslim world is divided on the issue - some countries support the American response and others are openly hostile. Meanwhile the threat of escalation in terrorist attacks and the use of biological and chemical weapons is instilling fear into the minds of many people. Where will it all end?

The Bible has the answer to this question. The Middle East has been at the centre of world politics ever since the tiny state of Israel was established in 1948. Since then there has been a constant state of tension in the area with wars between Jews and the Arabs and countless acts of terrorism. Even as I write this editorial, an Israeli minister has been assassinated in Jerusalem.

Jesus told his disciples that Jerusalem would be under Gentile domination *'until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled'* [Luke 21.24 NIV] For nearly 2000 years His prophetic words have stood the test of time. Now the Jews are back in control of that much fought over city. Jesus also said that when these things happen *'nations will be in anguish and perplexity'* and *'men will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world.'* [Luke 21.25,26 NIV]

Despite appearances to the contrary, we believe that the course of world history has not changed and recent events are but a confirmation of Bible prophecy. The current series of articles on nations in prophecy (see page 1) demonstrates that God is in control and will intervene to put an end to human misrule. As Jesus said: *'At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory'* [Luke 21.27 NIV]

Will you be ready for that world shaking event?

Basic Bible Teaching

Belief and Baptism

IN THE BIBLE, one of the core teachings of Jesus is about belief and baptism. Jesus said to his disciples before he left them to ascend to heaven, *'Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.'* [Mark 16.15,16] This statement then, is very clear. To be saved, one must believe the gospel - that is the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ - and then be baptized. This is the first step to salvation. In order to take this step, we must fully understand what it means.

Our objective in this article will be to show first, the necessity of correct belief prior to baptism and secondly, what baptism really consists of. Belief and baptism, together with the demonstration of faith by following God's commandments, will in God's mercy result in the salvation of the believer when Jesus returns to set up his Kingdom.

WHAT IS BELIEF IN THE GOSPEL?

The verse quoted above from the gospel of Mark clearly confirms to us that belief is an essential pre-requisite to baptism. Belief in what? Jesus said, *'the gospel.'* [Mark 1.15] Gospel means 'good news' and refers to the good news about two things - God's kingdom and Jesus. In the book of Acts we read about the results of Philip's preaching: *'But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.'* [Acts 8.12]

As we study the Bible, we learn about the gospel and God's plan of salvation from the book of Genesis onwards. What are *'the things concerning... the name of Jesus Christ?'* Abraham was the father of the Jewish race and God made a promise to him that a 'seed' or descendant of his would rule the entire world in peace and that through this 'seed' all nations of the earth would ultimately be blessed. This 'seed' is Jesus and we read in the New Testament how his lineage is traced all the way back to David king of Israel and to Abraham. [Matthew 1.1] This promise concerning a 'seed' was renewed to Abraham's sons Isaac and Jacob

and later, promises were also made to David. God promised David that after his death:

‘... I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build an house for my name, and I will stablish the throne of his kingdom for ever.’ [2 Samuel. 7.12,13]

When the Apostle Paul referred to David, he said, *‘Of this man's seed hath God according to his promise raised unto Israel a Saviour, Jesus.’* [Acts 13.23] So David's ‘seed’ Jesus, is the future ruler of a glorious kingdom.

Belief in the *‘things concerning the kingdom of God’* is also necessary before baptism. The promises made so long ago have yet to be fulfilled. Jesus the saviour will return to this earth to set up God's kingdom and so fulfil the promise God made to David. Jesus will sit on David's throne in Jerusalem and rule the world according to God's laws. The prophet Isaiah gives us many vivid word pictures of this glorious Kingdom age. (Read Isaiah 2.1-4; 11.1-9; 65.17-25) What a wonderful time to look forward to! If we truly believe what God tells us about Jesus and His Kingdom, our belief will prompt us to take action to be baptised.

When we look at the many churches in existence today, we see that what is called baptism is actually a sprinkling of water on infants' heads. Infant baptism is not found in the Bible and it is problematic for several reasons. Later on, we will look at the true meaning of baptism and will see how infant sprinkling violates the real meaning behind the original Greek word for baptism. However, the baptism of infants poses another problem – it is connected with knowledge and belief. As we have seen, before a man or woman can truly be baptised, that person must have knowledge about God and His purpose. Of course, a tiny baby cannot have very much knowledge about anything! This knowledge also needs to be accompanied by belief - that is, the person must both know the facts about Jesus and God's kingdom and believe what he or she knows.

The Ethiopian eunuch is a prominent example in the New Testament of someone who desired to be baptised. He was reading from the prophet Isaiah and when Philip passed by him, they began to converse about the meaning of Isaiah's words. At first glance, this account in the book of Acts seems to indicate that little knowledge was required before someone was baptised: *‘And as they (Philip and the eunuch) went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? And*

Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest...and he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him.' [Acts 8.36-38]

However, when the eunuch was baptized, he already possessed a great deal of knowledge about the gospel from his familiarity with the prophets of the Old Testament. After all, he had been reading from Isaiah when Philip met him. All that was further required, was a belief that Jesus was the promised Messiah who is mentioned so often in the Old Testament prophetic books such as Isaiah. The eunuch knew all his facts; the only requirement was that he believe and then he could be baptized. Today we have the entire Bible, both Old and New Testaments telling us about the gospel. During the time when Jesus lived on the earth, people had what we know today as the Old Testament, to tell them about God. Much of the Old Testament also tells us about things connected to Jesus, so people of that time needed to believe that Jesus was the Messiah and that everything prophesied about him would come true.

Belief in the gospel must be accompanied by repentance. God wants us to truly feel sorry for our past sins and be humble enough to ask Him for forgiveness. Before an individual knows about God's Word and His commandments, that person will do many things that are contrary to God's laws. Therefore, when a person learns about God he or she must recognise their sinful state and repent of past sins done in ignorance of God's laws. This allows the person to be baptized with a clean heart, having sought forgiveness from God for all previous wrongdoing.

WHAT DOES BAPTISM REPRESENT?

Baptism is the divinely appointed ceremony for introducing believing sinners into the name of Christ. Paul wrote to the Galatians:

'...as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.' [Galatians. 3.27]

It is one of the conditions of salvation taught by Christ and the apostles in the first century. Peter said, *'Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ.'* [Acts 2.38] On another occasion Peter commanded them *'to be baptized in the name of the Lord.'* [Acts 10.48]

In baptism, we obtain the forgiveness of all past sins. This is illustrated by Peter when he was preaching to the Jews and others on the day of Pentecost. He

said in response to their question about what they should do: *'Repent, and be baptized... for the remission of sins.'* [Acts 2.38] Paul also explained this in his letter to the Romans when he wrote: *'Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?'* [Romans 6.3] When we look at this aspect more closely, we can understand that Jesus died in order that sin might be destroyed. Although Jesus possessed our nature, he lived a perfect life without sin and yet submitted to death upon the cross. He therefore condemned sin in his own body and brought to mankind a hope of resurrection from the dead and the promise of eternal life. (See Hebrews 9.26-28) For each of us to benefit from his redemptive work and have that promise fulfilled, we must become related to him in the way that God has appointed. This can be only by belief and baptism. Paul continues in his letter:

'Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection... Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him. For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God. Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.' [Romans 6.4,5,9-11]

WHAT DOES BAPTISM CONSIST OF?

Baptism is an action requiring total immersion in water. In all cases recorded in the Bible, we read that those who asked for baptism understood and believed the gospel message and then they were baptized into the name of Jesus Christ by the act of total immersion in water. This is supported by the example of Jesus himself being baptised by John in the river Jordan. We read that *'straightway coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens opened, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon him.'* [Mark 1.10]

Most of the churches about us would agree that baptism is essential to being saved. However, as mentioned earlier, in many cases it is administered to infants when a few days old in the form of sprinkled water. How did this practice originate? We have seen that Scriptural baptism involves total immersion, so it makes sense that there is absolutely no record of infant sprinkling in the Bible.

If we look at ecclesiastical history after the time of Christ, we find that the erroneous teaching that man has an immortal soul was introduced in the third century. It began to be taught that the righteous go to heaven at death and the wicked to hell, doctrines which are not to be found in the Bible. It was therefore argued that if a child died before reaching an age of responsibility, it would be consigned to hell unless it had been baptized. A council held in the third century resolved that baptism should be performed within the second or third day after birth since, if the child died prior to baptism, its soul would be lost. It was about the same time that the teaching was introduced that those who were in a weak state of health and could not endure total immersion in water, could be sprinkled with water. This practice has prevailed ever since and gradually more and more churches have performed the rite of baptism by sprinkling instead of total immersion in water. In most cases, babies are sprinkled with water very early in their life. It should also be noted that this practice was actually derived from paganism. In Roman times, prior to the adoption of Christianity, a newly born girl on the eighth day after birth, and a boy on the ninth day, underwent a ceremony of purification with so called 'holy water' in order to protect them against sorcery.

It will help us to understand baptism if we look at the original word in the Greek language. This word has nothing to do with so-called 'christening'. The word baptism as used in the New Testament, is a translation of the Greek word '**baptizo**' that means to dip or to plunge into a liquid. This word was used in the dyeing trade and referred to immersing a garment or piece of cloth into a liquid dye. The complete immersion of the garment into the dye resulted in a change of colour in the garment being dipped or 'baptized.'

Another clear example that shows the meaning of the word '**baptizo**' is a text from the Greek poet and physician Nicander, who lived about 200 BC. It is a recipe for making pickles and it is helpful because it uses this word '**baptizo**.' In order to make a pickle, the vegetable was 'baptized' in a vinegar solution in order to make a permanent change.

What about us then, does the water bring about a permanent change when we are baptised? No. There is nothing special about the water used in baptism and water in itself will not change us. However, the act of baptism symbolises a change from our former way of life to a new life committed to following God's commandments. Baptism combined with belief in the gospel, a renunciation of former beliefs and a confession of our sins, will bring about a great change. By being baptized, we are buried with Jesus by baptism into his death. As Jesus was

in the grave for three days before being raised to eternal life, so in baptism we are 'buried' under water briefly, to rise up out of it to the hope of eternal life in God's kingdom. (Read Romans 6.1-5) By the forgiveness of sins and being admitted into covenant relationship with God and Christ, we begin a new life 'in Christ' - a probationary period in this lifetime. Jesus likened it to being born again:

'Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born? Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water, and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.' [John 3.3-5]

This new life is a time of preparation for the gift of eternal life to be bestowed by Christ when he returns to set up the kingdom of God. Baptism is the way God has appointed for us to enter into this new life 'in Christ' but it is just the first step. Baptism washes away all previous sins and allows the believer to start a new life before God. After baptism, the believer is then committed to following as closely as possible the teachings of the Bible. This commitment needs to be put into practice every day of the believer's life, since Jesus at his coming will judge all believers on their actions. Baptism links us to Jesus. It also links us to those faithful patriarchs of Israel mentioned earlier - Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and David who received Divine promises concerning their 'seed' or descendant the Lord Jesus Christ. Finally it gives us the hope of entry into the wonderful kingdom that God has promised to set up on earth, as Paul reminded the Galatian believers:

'For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ...And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham' seed, and heirs according to the promise.'

[Galatians 3.27,29]

Norman Grey
Ontario, Canada

Women of Faith -

Mary, the Mother of Jesus

OF ALL THE faithful women mentioned in Scripture, Mary the mother of Jesus stands out as probably the most privileged yet humble of God's female servants. The love and dedication she gave to her eldest son was remarkable, as was her unwavering faith in God. We must bear in mind that from her knowledge of the Old Testament Scriptures and her acute perception of just who her son was, there would have been times when the discernment of his impending death, caused her much heart-searching and sadness. Here was an ordinary Hebrew woman who had found great favour with God and was subsequently entrusted with the care, upbringing and nurture of His only Son. Mary was a lowly girl, but possessed all the necessary spiritual attributes to help her carry out the daunting task of bringing up her son. This she did with much dignity and a deep reverence for God. Mary was, without a doubt, a very remarkable woman.

HER BACKGROUND AND CHARACTER

From the Biblical record we understand that Mary was not materially rich yet she came from an illustrious background. Her genealogy is found in the third chapter of Luke, and can be traced back to David, that great king of Israel through his son Nathan. The prophet Isaiah through the power of the Holy Spirit proclaimed: *'A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse.'* [Isaiah 11.1 NIV] Jesse was the father of King David and the 'shoot' or offspring that would come from this royal line, was the Lord Jesus Christ. This is further confirmed by Isaiah: *'Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.'* [Isaiah 7.14] How remarkable this prophecy was, written some 700 years before the birth of Jesus and fulfilled completely. Mary indeed was the promised virgin who would bear a son. She conceived the Son of God by the power of the Holy Spirit and brought forth *'Emmanuel'* meaning *'God with us.'* [Matthew 1.20-23]

The name Mary means 'bitterness' and is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew name, Miriam. This is suitably fitting for the mother of Christ, for without a doubt she endured great bitterness and sadness, having to stand by and

watch her eldest son suffer a cruel and undeserving death. Yet nowhere in Scripture is it ever recorded that Mary questioned or doubted God. Her age is not recorded but we can glean from the Gospel records that she was probably quite a young woman when God chose her to bear Jesus. It is also very telling that about the same time, Elisabeth her elder cousin gave birth to John the Baptist the forerunner of Jesus. God had indeed chosen a righteous family, both women truly were, 'Mothers in Israel' possessing Godly characters fit for the outworking of His purpose.

In the first chapter of Luke's gospel, the angel Gabriel appears to Mary. We are told that apart from being troubled at the angel's wonderful message, Mary fully accepts the fact that God had chosen her to bear His Son and she exclaims: '*Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word.*' [Luke 1.38] How we can marvel at her words. Here was a tender and inexperienced girl, who had just been told that she was to be the mother of God's only Son. Her acceptance of what the Almighty had planned for her, was an outward sign of just how faithful and humble she really was. Mary also had to bear the stigma of 'being with child' and unmarried, a truly dishonourable thing for any woman living in those times. Again we are reminded of her faith and confidence that God would deliver her from even the most humiliating situation. This woman was also devoutly religious, not embracing the false outward show of religion that her son would eventually condemn, but having a gentle spirit with an understanding and deep regard for God's Word. This is confirmed when she expressed her joy to Elisabeth her cousin about her pregnancy. Here on record, is a wonderful selection of Old Testament prophecies which echo the words of another righteous woman of faith, Hannah the mother of Samuel. [1 Samuel 2.1-10] (See article in Volume 17.1 page 11 – January 2001) Both women gave praise to God for the glorious things that He had done in their lives. Even more so for Mary, whose realisation that she was to bring forth the Messiah of Israel, caused to flow from her a great exclamation of joy, which is expressed in her song of praise:

‘ “...My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me - holy is his name. His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation....He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants for ever, even as he said to our fathers.”’ [Luke 1.46-51,54,55 NIV]

THE EARLY YEARS

We are not told very much about Jesus' family life, although his birth is recorded by both Matthew and Luke. We can read of his humble entrance into the world and again ponder the feelings of his mother as she gave birth to her firstborn son. Throughout her pregnancy, Mary would have experienced the wonders of a new life developing deep within her body. Again the knowledge that this child gently growing and unfolding inside her was the promised Messiah, the King of Israel, whose Father was the Creator of heaven and earth, must have been continually on her mind. As she gave birth to her son in Bethlehem in the most modest of circumstances, her only consolation and comfort would be that God was overseeing this momentous event. As her child made its entrance into the world, Mary's joy would be twofold, firstly that her son had been safely delivered and secondly that here at last was the promised Messiah of Israel.



The courtyard of an inn situated in Bethlehem

With the attendance of shepherds after the birth of Jesus, we are given a small insight into the gentle mind of Christ's mother. In the 2nd chapter of Luke, we read that after the shepherds had visited the baby, they went and told everyone about this wonderful event: *'But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.'* [Luke 2.19 NIV] Perhaps the implications of it all was just becoming more evident to this young mother. With her spiritual outlook and knowledge of Scripture no doubt many of the ancient prophecies crowded in on her mind. The prophet Isaiah through the Holy Spirit, recorded the death of the

future Messiah with all the humiliation and sadness that his demise would bring. [Isaiah chapter 53] Mary could well have understood this and other prophecies. If so, she carried her thoughts silently within her heart right up until the time of Jesus' death.

When Mary and Joseph took Jesus up to Jerusalem, to offer up the sacrifices necessary under the Law of Moses, we read that they met Simeon, a righteous man, who was patiently awaiting the arrival of the Messiah. [Luke 2.21-24] Guided by the Holy Spirit, Simeon offered up praise to God, recognising that the child before him was indeed the long awaited King of Israel. [Luke 2.29-32] He spoke prophetically to Mary and told her that her child was: *'destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too.'* [Luke 2.34,35 NIV] How true this prophecy would be. Mary indeed would have a sword of sadness and grief pierce her many times. We are told in God's word that without suffering, faith is not sharpened and we cannot hope to learn obedience to God. This was no exception for Mary and even more so for her son, Jesus: *'Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered.'* [Hebrews 5.8]

Throughout the young life of Jesus, we can imagine how Mary might have looked upon her son with awe. Jesus would not have been anything like her other children. We can imagine that as a child and young man, he would have shown compassion, untold patience and consideration to his family, friends and neighbours. These Godly characteristics would certainly hallmark Jesus as being very different from those around him. In Luke's gospel we read how at 12 years of age, Jesus became separated from his parents in Jerusalem and was eventually found in the temple speaking with the teachers of law. [Luke 2.42-52] Again, we glimpse a little of Mary's natural concern as a mother: *'Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing.'* [Luke 2.48] All parents naturally worry when their child goes missing and Mary and Joseph were no exception. We further read in the same chapter how Jesus explained to them that he was about his *'Father's business.'* The record continues that Mary *'kept all these sayings in her heart.'* [Luke 2.51] Over the years and slowly perhaps, the realisation of how her son matched up to all the Old Testament prophecies, caused his mother to ponder much in her heart.

SUNSHINE AFTER RAIN

The faith that Mary exhibited in her life enabled her to look beyond the suffering of Jesus. Whilst he hung pitifully on the cross, a few women were weeping and sitting at his feet. Mary his mother was there with her sister and

John the disciple 'whom Jesus loved.' [John 13.23] It was to John that Jesus entrusted his dear mother, knowing that this gentle disciple would indeed care for her and love her as his own. It is very telling that John had a similar character to Christ and we can imagine that Mary would have felt very safe with him and doubtless an empathy would have grown between them, each giving the other comfort and strength throughout the following years.

No doubt after his resurrection Jesus appeared to his mother again in Jerusalem, giving her much consolation and strength before his ascension into heaven. The Scriptures do not reveal the details but it would be in keeping with Christ's character that he would firstly appear to those whom he had loved and cherished. We can imagine how wonderful this reunion would have been, Jesus imparting words of comfort to the woman who had loved and cared for him for over thirty years. How wonderful Mary's joy must have been and this most spiritual of women would have offered up many words of praise to God for the glorious act that He had performed, in 'raising up' her beloved son to life again. All of Mary's sad thoughts would now vanish and the sword that had 'pierced her soul,' would be withdrawn. She had spent much of her adult life nurturing this special child of hers, influencing him with her godly ways and watching him grow into the full stature of the man of God. She had patiently followed him, no doubt in wonder listening to his words of grace, observing the great acts of kindness to all men and the untold miracles that he performed. All the time, we can envisage how this meek and godly woman was growing in the understanding of God's plan of salvation which was centred in this her eldest son. As Jesus grew older it is highly probable that the two of them would have spent many hours together pondering over the Scriptures; Jesus gently helping Mary to understand the deeper meanings contained in the Law of Moses and prophetic writings that had become his guide and strength.

FINAL THOUGHTS

The life of Mary had not been an easy one. Joseph, Jesus' guardian father, is not mentioned later on in Jesus' life, so perhaps we can assume he did not attain a great age and may have died sometime during the childhood of Christ, after settling in Nazareth. We are told that Jesus had other brothers and sisters, so Mary still had a family at home and had to care and provide for them. When Jesus reached the age of thirty years, his mother watched him going about his '*Father's business.*' Like countless other mothers throughout the ages, Mary probably fussed and worried over her eldest son, although now an adult, she perhaps saw in his face a constant weariness and exhaustion. The dedication he gave to his Father's service was intense and ongoing and no doubt this caring mother often longed just to sit quietly with him and wait upon his needs. But Jesus was never fully hers, in the sense that he was the Son of God and had come

into the world to perform a difficult and painful task.



This building found at old Nazareth, occupies the ancient site of a synagogue, possibly where Jesus read from the scroll of Isaiah [see Luke 4.16]

We are not told in Scripture when Mary died, but she now rests in the grave just as her ancestor, King David, does. One day soon her son, the Lord Jesus Christ will return to the earth as he promised. [Matthew 24.27] When Jesus raises Mary up from her long sleep, she will hope to see that 'smile of welcome' that all of God's faithful servants long to see and then be ushered into an everlasting Kingdom by her Messiah. Possibly she will recall those beautiful words so full of praise and joy, uttered long ago to her cousin Elisabeth, when she realised that she was to bring forth the Christ, the King of Israel: 'My soul doth magnify the Lord, And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.' [Luke 1.46,47] In God's Kingdom on earth, she will indeed magnify the Lord for the ages of eternity and her joy likewise, will continue forever.

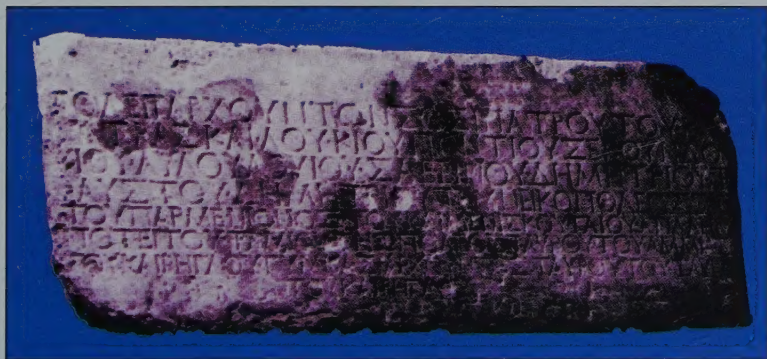
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Bible Truths

The Politarchs of Thessalonica

ON ONE OF their missionary journeys, Paul and Silas came to Thessalonica in Macedonia. (Part of Northern Greece) We read in the book of Acts that *'As his custom was, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures.'* [Acts 17.2 NIV] His preaching, with God's blessing, was so successful that *'Some of the Jews were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a large number of God-fearing Greeks and not a few prominent women.'* [Acts 17.4 NIV]

However the Jews of the city were not happy about this and stirred up a mob that attacked the house of Jason while looking for Paul and Silas. When they failed to find them they dragged Jason and other followers of Christ before the *'city officials.'* [Acts 17.6 NIV] The interesting thing here is that the Greek word used for *'city officials'* is *'politarchs'*, which means rulers of a city. It is not found anywhere else in the Greek literature that survives. Therefore we have this Greek word *'politarch'* used to describe these *'City Officials'* which is unique to the Biblical record.



The marble inscription engraved with the names of the 'politarchs'

The remarkable fact is that in 1835 an inscription was found with this very word on it. It was built into a Roman arch that spanned the Egnatian Way on the West side of Thessalonica. The arch was destroyed in 1867 but the block of marble with the inscription on it was saved and is now in the British Museum. The inscription shows that in Paul's time Thessalonica was indeed governed by rulers called 'politarchs', and the names of six of these 'city rulers' are shown on this stone.

The use of this word by Luke, the writer of The Acts of the Apostles, was unique in referring to the city rulers in the area of Macedonia at that time. For those who love the Bible, the research of the archaeologist and other scholars, has resulted in another amazing confirmation of the historical accuracy of God's Word.

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Correction

A reader has pointed out that the article in the last issue entitled 'God the Creator', contained an error. (See: Volume 17 No 5, page 16 first paragraph) Newton's model of the solar system did not include the planets Uranus, Neptune and Pluto, as these were not discovered until long after his death in 1727. This does not of course, undermine Newton's argument concerning the existence of God the Creator as demonstrated by his model.

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